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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEGUCIGALPA 000952

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: TFH01: FREEDOM OF THE PRESS AND EXPRESSION
POST-COUP UPDATE 3

REF: A. TEGUCIGALPA 809

[1](#)B. TEGUCIGALPA 707

Classified By: Ambassador Hugo Llorens, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Freedom of the press and expression continue to be threatened in Honduras by the de facto regime and its supporters. Recent actions against anti-coup media outlets continue to create a hostile environment for them. The Ambassador expressed to the head of the National Telecommunications Commission concern regarding allegations of interference by the de facto regime with freedom of the press. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) The Ambassador met with Esdras Armado Lopez Rodriguez, the owner of anti-coup Channel 36 and Radio Globo, on September 9. Lopez told the Ambassador that since September 3, Channel 36 has experienced systematic interference with its satellite signal. This interference inhibited the channel from broadcasting throughout the country, except in the capital of Tegucigalpa where local transmitters broadcast the channel's signal. The Ambassador expressed concern regarding the interference and told Lopez that the Embassy would raise the issue of press freedom with the Attorney General's office and the National Telecommunications Commission (CONATEL).

[1](#)3. (C) Lopez confirmed to Poloff on September 12 that Channel 36 experienced another attack when unknown perpetrators threw a tear gas canister at the station's building in the early morning hours of September 12 and left a threatening note. The note reportedly said: "A dead Zelaya supporter is better than a live one." There were no reported injuries. This attack followed a formal request by Lopez to police on August 31 for police protection, which the police initially ignored. Lopez also confirmed to Poloff that after the September 12 attack, police responded favorably and are now providing police protection to the Channel 36 building. However, Lopez complained that police had failed to provide protection to the station's transmitters, which were subject to attack on August 23 (ref A).

[1](#)4. (C) Lopez filed a formal complaint on September 16 with Special Prosecutor for Human Rights Sandra Ponce regarding the interference of the Channel 36 signal. Lopez stated that he believed this type of interference could not be carried out without the permission or acquiescence of the National Commission of Telecommunications (CONATEL). Lopez further contended that the interference cannot be carried out without the knowledge of Intelsat, the US-based private company that

offers the satellite service.

15. (C) Post formally expressed its concern to Special Prosecutor for Human Rights Sandra Ponce on September 17 regarding the alleged interference of the Channel 36 signal and highlighted concern over the continued attacks against press freedom in Honduras. Ponce responded that the Attorney General's office had formally requested that CONATEL investigate the alleged signal interference and that CONATEL had agreed to launch the investigation.

16. (C) Post confirmed that on September 18, 15 masked police and representatives of the Attorney General's office visited the Tegucigalpa offices of large cable provider Cable Color. General Manager Cesar Rosenthal spoke to Poloff on September 18 and said he was told the reason for the visit was to investigate the legality of Cable Color's Voice over the Internet Protocol (VOIP) service. Rosenthal said he received reports around the same time of the visit that CONATEL investigators arrived at the station's transmitters requesting permission to carry out an inspection. The inspection was carried out and Rosenthal told Poloff the equipment continues to operate. Rosenthal told Poloff that contrary to press reports, the police that visited his cable company on September 18 did not/not make statements about the transmission service it provides to anti-coup Channel 36. Rosenthal explained that the last time he had been told by CONATEL to discontinue service to anti-coup Channel 36 was in mid-August (ref B).

17. (C) On September 18, the Ambassador called the de facto regime's head of CONATEL, Miguel Rodas, and expressed concern

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about ongoing reports of limitations on press freedom. The Ambassador affirmed that press freedom is of paramount importance and that the United States follows all allegations closely. Rodas replied that the visit to Cable Color on September 18 was to investigate a licensing issue, but affirmed that under no circumstances would CONATEL close any media outlets in this environment. At the suggestion of the Ambassador, Rodas agreed to make public statements in favor of press freedom and the liberty of expression. Rodas confirmed that an investigation was launched regarding the alleged interference of the signal of Channel 36 and that since the investigation began on September 16, there had been no interference.

18. (C) The recent actions against Channel 36 and Cable Color follow another incident on August 31 involving Radio America in Olanchito, Yoro Department. An owner of the station, Liliana Andonie, reported to Poloff that unknown assailants attacked a guard and attempted to sabotage the radio's transmitters but were unsuccessful. Radio America reported to Poloff that they resumed transmission on September 1. On September 4, local police captain Carlos Rubi Fuentes told the media that the police investigation found the incident was an assault on the security guard and that the transmitters were working correctly.

19. (C) Comment: CONATEL Commissioner Miguel Rodas appeared nervous but sincere during his phone call with the Ambassador and appeared to take the inquiry seriously. The incident at Cable Color on September 18 could involve a valid licensing issue as Rodas claims. However, this visit to a media outlet by CONATEL with masked police officers calls into question the objective of the visit and the ability of press to operate freely.
LLORENS